

A Detail Step Approach to the Federal Acquisition Marketplace

Doing business with Federal Government agencies can be very lucrative for the people who learn how to maneuver through the maze of registrations, certifications and regulations. If you are ready to start, these are the first steps you need to take to open the door to federal business opportunities.

Step 1: Identify your product or service. It is necessary to know the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) code and the Federal Supply Classification (FSC) code for your product or service. Most federal government product/service listings and procurements are identified by their NAICS code and/or FSC code. You can find the codes relating to your business at these web sites: NAICS codes: <http://www.census.gov/epcd/www/naics.html> and FSC codes: <http://fpdcapp.gsa.gov/pls/fpdsweb/PscWiz>

Step 2. Check with the Small Business Administration (SBA) to determine whether your business falls within the established table of small business size standards matched to NAICS industries. You may be very surprised just how big a company can be and still be considered "small" in the eyes of the federal government. <http://www.sba.gov/size/>

Step 3: Obtain a DUNS Number from Dun & Bradstreet. This is a business identification number that is used much like a person uses a social security number. If you do not have a DUNS Number, contact Dun and Bradstreet to obtain one. There is no charge for assigning a DUNS number and you must have one to proceed. You may call Dun & Bradstreet at (866) 705-5711 or use its website <https://eupdate.dnb.com/requestoptions/government/ccrreg/>

Step 4: Register in the Centralized Contractor Registration (CCR) System. With very limited exception, you must be registered in CCR to be awarded a contract from any Federal Civilian or Military agency. CCR is a database designed to hold contractor information required for Federal procurement and financial transactions. The information in the CCR also facilitates fast electronic payment of contractor invoices. <http://www.ccr.gov>

Step 5: Determine if your business qualifies for Small Business 8(a), SDB (Small Disadvantaged Business) or HUBZone (Historically Underutilized Business Zone) certification. These certifications are detailed. They are essentially for companies that are owned and controlled by socially and economically disadvantaged individuals or small businesses with a "principal office" in a historically underutilized business zone. When contracting, the Federal Government sometimes sets aside procurements for or offers preferences to 8(a), SDB, or HUBZone certified business concerns. <http://www.sba.gov/gcbd/>

Step 6: Register in Online Representations and Certifications Application (ORCA). ORCA is a recent e-Government initiative that was designed to replace the paper based Representations and Certifications process. ORCA is the primary federal government repository for all of your company's required representations and certifications and can be accessed by federal procuring agencies. <http://orca.bpn.gov>

Step 7: Begin to search for current Federal Government procurement opportunities. Identify current procurement opportunities in your product or service area by visiting the

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FedBizOpps web site at <http://www.fedbizopps.gov> which is the Federal Civilian and Military Government single point of entry for business opportunities over \$25,000.

Step 8: Familiarize yourself with both the Federal Civilian and Department of Defense (DoD) contracting legal procedures. The Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) can be found at <http://www.arnet.gov/far/>. Individual Federal Agencies also have supplemental procurement regulations, such as the Defense Federal Acquisition Regulation Supplement (DFARS) located at URL: <http://www.acq.osd.mil/dpap/dars/dfars/index.htm> These are the legal regulations for Federal acquisitions. If you are serious about Federal procurements, you need to know and understand the legal requirements and regulations pertaining to Federal contracts.

Step 9: Investigate if "getting on the GSA Schedule" is right for you. Federal agencies can use Government-wide Acquisition Contracts (GWACs) and General Services Administration's (GSA) Federal Supply Service (FSS) Schedule Contracts to make purchases. These pre-approved contracts are used to buy commonly used products, services, and solutions needed to fulfill their missions and day-to-day operations. These opportunities are rarely announced on the FedBizOpps site as stated in Step 7 above, but are normally competed amongst pre-qualified vendors already under contract. <http://www.gsa.gov>

Step 10: Seek additional assistance, as needed, in the federal civilian and/or DoD marketplaces. Procurement Technical Assistance Centers (PTACs) are Federally-funded organizations that offer free help. PTACs can be found at <http://www.dla.mil/db/procurem.htm>

Step 11: Familiarize yourself with the procurement forecasts for your targeted agencies. Each Federal agency typically produces an Annual Procurement Forecast, as required by the Small Business Act, which is maintained by their Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization (OSDBU) or equivalent. You may contact each agency OSDBU for specifics. www.firstgov.gov. Use this procurement forecast to determine good prospects for you.

Step 12: Explore subcontracting opportunities. Regardless of your product or service, it is important that you do not neglect a very large secondary market - subcontracting opportunities through prime contractors. Although there is no single point of entry for subcontracting opportunities in the Federal or civilian procurement marketplace, SBA's SUB-Net is a valuable resource for obtaining information on subcontracting opportunities. Prime contractors, government, commercial, and educational entities, may post solicitations or notices on that website. <http://www.web.sba.gov/subnet/>

For DoD, the Office of Small Business Programs (OSBP) Website lists all major DoD prime contractors by state and provides a point of contact (Small Business Liaison Officer) for each contractor. Investigate potential opportunities with these firms. Many of these firms also have websites that may be useful. Partnering with a prime contractor as its subcontractor can be an excellent entry platform to the Federal marketplace. <http://www.acq.osd.mil/sadbu/>

Step 13: Investigate government programs. There are several SBA programs that may be of interest to you, such as the 8(a) Business Development Mentor-Protege Program, the Small

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Business Innovation Research Program (SBIR), the Small Business Technology Transfer Research Program (STTR), and the Technology Resources Network. <http://www.sba.gov/gcbd/>

There are several DoD programs, some derived from the aforementioned programs, that may also be of interest to you, such as the Mentor-Protege Program, the Small Business Innovation Research Program, Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Minority Institutions Program. Information on these and other programs is available on the OSBP Website. <http://www.acq.osd.mil/sadbu/>

Step 14: Market your firm to the right contacts. Identify your prospective Government customers, research their requirements, and familiarize yourself with applicable procurement regulations and strategies. There are many procuring organizations to consider, and educating yourself about their roles and missions will be no small task, but essential nonetheless.

When it is time to market your product or service, present your capabilities directly to the people who buy it. Wherever possible, arrange marketing visits to agency project and program personnel. Provide catalogues and brochures to key personnel within the agencies. Many Federal agencies hold small business fairs or matchmaking sessions that emphasize how to do business with the Government, and provide information regarding their program activities. Realize that, like your own, their time is valuable and limited. If the match is a good one, you may be able to provide them with a cost-effective, quality solution to their requirements.